

Sunday December 14th 2008
For This Day

1). Lu 2:8 ¶ *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

a). As we approach this time of the year that we have come to call Christmas it is an intriguing question to ask why the scripture is replete with intricate detail about the Lord's birth, but is silent as to the actual day His birth took place.

b). As we search the scriptures we find given to us, even to the very hour, the exact day of His death, burial, resurrection and ascension – but not His birth.

c). The only thing we can conclude from this, as with other scriptural silences, is that God does not consider this particular piece of information to be of value for us, because if it were of value it would be given.

2). This may at first glance appear strange, but is it really?

a). Would we really expect the Lord's first advent to be presented any differently than His second? - Mt 24:42 *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.*

b). 1Th 5:1 ¶ *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

c). Do we realize that if we knew the exact day of the Lord's return for His Church there is every possibility that we would be more focused on the actual physical date of the day than that which the day itself portends for us? And there is no doubt that the way in which we live our lives would be markedly different.

d). If we continue in our scripture from 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5 we find something pertinent to this thought – 1Th 5:4 *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 ¶ Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

e). So what do we see here? Those Christians who won't experience the Lord's second coming as a thief in the night are those who are properly preparing themselves for that Day, whenever it should come – those who are not asleep but are watching and sober – those who have put on and are in the process of putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation – those then whose focus is on the salvation yet to be revealed, the salvation of the soul – those whose future hope directs their present action. Those who will continue with patient endurance during the trials and tribulations of life, knowing that they must be prepared every moment, without ever knowing how much time they have.

f). Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

g). What we see here in our scriptures from Thessalonians and Hebrews, as in all the other places, is that our focus is to be the same as God's focus – on the Kingdom which is to come – and of course on what is necessary to participate in the Kingdom as a joint heir.

h). And in the same way it would be impossible to look at the Lord's birth apart from this same focus. The actual day its self is of no significance compared with what the day portends.

i). This is probably why scripture is silent about the Lord's birthday, because it is a part of our fallen human nature to lock on to something tangible and specific and as a result we could find ourselves in idolatry as we would bow our knee to the day rather than what the day makes possible. Could that even be a present reality do you think?

3). Well let's look at what scripture says about the Lord's birth and see if we can gain some insight - Ga 4:4 *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

a). Regardless of the day or the month of the Lord's birth what we know for certain is that it happened 'when the fullness of the time had come'.

b). This was not an arbitrary event but a specific and exact moment within the course of human history that had been predetermined in the eternal council chambers of God before time began.

c). Nor was this a secretive event done in the shadow of obscurity, but an event that God had revealed to man from the very beginning - Ge 3:15 *And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."*

d). And the focus for this event, before the Lord ever inhabited the womb of the virgin, is the seventh day, the Millennial Kingdom. 'God sent forth His Son....that we might receive the adoption as sons' – a clear reference to events at and beyond the Judgment Seat.

e). We see then a direct connection between the birth of God's Son and our own future adoption as sons – Christ's birth, as part of the plans and purposes of God with regards to rulership over the earth, made our adoption as sons, and all that goes along with that, possible.

f). And this is clearly presented in the Messianic - Ps 2:7 ¶ *"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today [for this day] I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.*

g). These are the very words the writer of Hebrews quotes in Chapter 1 within the context of the age to come that will not be subject to angels.

h). The scripture is unequivocal – Christ was begotten, went through the process of a natural birth, for the purpose of realizing His inheritance in the age which is to come – He was born for that purpose - Joh 18:37 *Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

i). His life, His death, the cross, His resurrection are all with a view to the seventh day, and it is only in the realization of the seventh day that these events find their true significance.

j). We often want to make these events an end in themselves, when really, if we can say it this way, they are the means to the end.

4). Look at the pronouncement that Gabriel makes to Mary - Lu 1:26 ¶ *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" 29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 "He will be*

great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." 34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 "For with God nothing will be impossible." 38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

a). Mary would not be unfamiliar with the OT scriptures, and it is to these very scriptures that Gabriel draws attention – that glorious promise that had been made to David by God through the prophet Nathan - 2Sa 7:12 *"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.*

b). And then to confirm the veracity of God's word Gabriel gives witness to the power of God in the life of Mary's relative, Elizabeth, 'who was called barren'.

c). The no longer barren womb of Elizabeth with its obvious echoes of Sarah and the birth of Isaac, the son of promise, would give strong encouragement to Mary to know that her own barren womb would be no obstacle to the out-working of God's purpose - Php 2:5 *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.*

d). No doubt Mary would recall the words of the prophet Isaiah – Isa 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*

e). A scripture that contextually has to do with the restoration of Israel with God in their midst.

f). And Mary's response to Gabriel, 'Let it be to me according to your word' is a magnificent example of faith in action – Mary's faith is not just in that which the angel has just said to her in real time, if you will, but also that which God had said in His word from past time, to which Gabriel made reference.

g). The pronouncement made by the angel was not something of which she had no knowledge, it would be an integral part of the very being of the Jew, the strangeness of it would be in that it was made to her rather than anyone else.

h). But the one thing we cannot overlook in this encounter is that the angel's pronouncement has to do with the regality of Christ and the eternal nature of His Kingdom – and within the whole context of scripture this would be referencing something that even today is still future.

i). So then, at the pronouncement of the Lord's conception, God's focus is the future Messianic Kingdom – it is for that day that He was begotten.

j). And because of the foundation of the 7 days laid out for us in Genesis we would know that Christ's first advent was preparation for that Day it would not be the Day itself - Lu 24:25 *Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"*

k). Again witness Mary's words when she visits Elizabeth following the Holy Spirit's overshadowing - Lu 1:46 *And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. 49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. 50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. 54 He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."*

l). Her utterance here is both of praise and prophecy – and its focus is that future Day when Gentile world power will be overthrown and God will fulfill His promises to Abraham and his seed, both in the heavens and on the earth.

5). And if we look at some of the other classic 'Christmas' scriptures we will see that this same truth is evident - Isa 9:6 *For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

a). Again we see regality with respect to the throne of David – a kingdom administered in righteousness and justice, a kingdom that will be an everlasting Kingdom, with the government on the shoulder of the Son.

b). We see the deliverance and restoration of Israel and the peace that will come to Jerusalem.

c). And the names used of Him here in Isaiah are not the names that were used with respect to His first coming.

d). In fact the Lord made it abundantly clear at the end of His earthly ministry that the setting up of the prophesied Kingdom was not for that time – Joh 18:36 *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."*

e). His Kingdom will not be established in this age, it must wait for the age to come – an age that awaits the Lord's Second Advent – the age of which all scripture speaks.

f). Even the declaration of the place of the Lord's birth has its focus on a future regality and a future redemption for Israel - Mic 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." 3 Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel. 4 And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth;*

g). Bethlehem is the place of the Lord's birth, but it is not the physical place or the birth that are the focus in our scripture, but rather it is the re-gathering of Israel from the nations.

h). It is the birth of the 144 thousand Jewish evangelists depicted in Revelation Chapter 12 heralding the coming conclusion to the Tribulation.

i). It is the Day when the mountain of the Lord's House will fill the earth.

j). In fact the very association between Bethlehem and David the king – Lu 2:4 *Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,*

k). Would inevitably direct us back to 2 Samuel 7 and the future Kingdom of the greater Son of David.

l). The reference to Bethlehem has more to do with lineage than with location.

6). Then following the Lord's birth there is an encounter that takes place in the Temple on the day of the Lord's circumcision - Lu 2:25 ¶ *And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: 29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; 30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32 A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." 33 And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising [again] of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 "(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

a). This is so much more than just a confirmation of the Lord's deity, it is a prophetic pronouncement not only of the promised salvation of Israel that will result in their glory, but also of the light that would be brought to the Gentiles, anticipating the formation of the Church, inevitably looking to the day when both these entities will have the position of a firstborn son.

b). V34 is particularly interesting – It was exactly because of Christ that Israel fell to the lowest point in their history of unbelief at his crucifixion at His first advent, and it will be because of Christ that Israel will rise again to walk in the fullness of God's plans for them at the head of the nations during the Millennial Kingdom at His second advent.

c). And according to God's own commentary, Christ is given for a sign – a sign that must include His birth, His death and His resurrection – a sign which would be spoken against. An obvious reality, particularly with regards to Israel, even to this day.

d). And v35 is not just a reference to the pain Mary would experience at Christ's crucifixion, but must also be seen with respect to other related scripture concerning the salvation of the soul.

e). This verse in the way it is written draws us to - Heb 4:12 *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

f). Remember Mary was in the upper room on the Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection waiting for the promised Holy Spirit – Who would begin His search for the Bride.

7). And then there is Anna - Lu 2:36 *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

a). Please notice that in Simeon and Anna we see a single minded devotion. Simeon waiting for the Consolation of Israel that he could depart this world 'in peace'. And Anna, after the death of her husband, choosing not marry again but rather to serve God day and night 'with fastings and prayers' as she looked for 'redemption in Jerusalem'. Something it appears that others were looking for also. In these two we can see a picture of the heart and mind of the watching and waiting Christian of today.

b). But note that neither of them saw the fulfillment of that which they waited for. They saw the baby Jesus only – yet in that fact alone was the absolute assurance of that which God had promised concerning the Consolation of Israel and redemption in Jerusalem and it is the end result that is their focus.

c). Perhaps we could include them in the heroes of the faith in – Heb 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

d). It seems that for Simeon and Anna the Lord's birth was confirmation of the surety of His future Kingdom. Their focus was not their present circumstance, or indeed the birth of the child of itself but the certainty of God's promise.

8). Simeon and Anna are in sharp contrast to Herod whose focus on learning of the birth of Christ remained entirely in his present. For Herod the birth came like a thief in the night and he wanted to hang on to rulership in the present world system under Satan - Mt 2:1 ¶ *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

a). Mt 2:16 ¶ *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male*

children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more."

b). Herod had knowledge of the scriptures, but despite this his focus was not on God's promises for the future, but self-preservation and self-gratification in the present.

c). As a result of his actions he becomes a type of Satan seeking to destroy the Seed of the Woman and a type of Anti-Christ seeking to destroy the nation of Israel – a personification of the actions of the man of the flesh resulting in death and destruction in complete antithesis to the purpose of God. And would serve as a warning for us both for our present and with a view to our future.

9). And so as we would look at these scriptures giving detail of the Lord's first advent we can clearly determine that the events and timing of the Lord's birth must be seen within the overall context of scriptural revelation which has to do with the coming 7th Day – the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

a). And from God's perspective this future Day is to be our focus and not the day of the Lord's birth. And this would be poignantly portrayed in the contrast we found between Simeon and Anna and Herod.

10). So is it wrong for us to celebrate 'Christmas'? Well what does the scripture say?- Col 2:16 ¶ *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

a). This scripture would not relate specifically to 'Christmas', but we can see it in a principle that would be applicable, therefore, there is of itself nothing wrong with the celebration of 'Christmas', but let's be clear that there is no scriptural mandate for us to do so, and let us realize that all that 'Christmas' has become in the world and as part of the world is as a result of the traditions of men, not the will of God, and has come out of a church in which the word of the Kingdom has become almost totally corrupted as a result of the leaven placed in the 3 measures of meal in Matthew 13:33. And it is always our enemy's desire to have us take our eyes from the prize and look at something else. [cf. the ongoing war over Christmas]

b). But before we begin to despair, and uproot our Christmas trees, look what verse 17 of Colossians 2 said - *17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

c). Just as with the ordinance of Baptism, or the washing of feet, or the Lord's Supper – what a perfect opportunity that which we call 'Christmas Day' provides for us to reflect upon the spiritual truth which it teaches. As awesome as the event is, it is still in one sense just a shadow of the things to come. And what a tremendous opportunity it provides for us to teach the truth of scripture to our children – complete with the second coming of the Lord and the preparations we need to make in readiness for that Day, rewards for good works and a feast, which is a particularly special family experience, and of course the example given by Mary, Simeon and Anna.

d). Every gift we give or gift we receive has the potential to open up spiritual truth that may sharpen our focus as we see in it the possibility of laying up treasure in heaven and our own reward at the Judgment Seat. A tangible object lesson is always a powerful thing providing we can see what it teaches.

e). The challenge for us is to keep our children safe from the depravity of the materialism that assails them from every direction at this time of year, and to guard our own hearts and minds in the process so as to not be swept away by the tide of worldliness our selves. We are to be in the world but not of the world. We must take our eyes from the glitter and look to the glory.

f). Now if we choose to focus on the reality of what the Lord's birth teaches rather than just the celebration of the day and the Baby in the manger, it will inevitably put us at odds with the world's view of Christmas and probably the world view of most of the church – but this would hardly be a new experience for us - Joh 15:19 *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

g). Mt 5:11 *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

h). The manger has been empty a long time now and it will never hold the baby Jesus again - at the second advent it will not be gentle Jesus meek and mild, wrapped in swaddling clothes – but the King of kings and Lord of lords whose eyes are a flame of fire, who has the sharp two edged sword, whose robe is dipped in blood. Who will in that Day sit on the throne of His father David and all that has been prophesied and promised will be reality.

i). Let us make 'Christmas day' a stepping stone to that Day and not a stumbling block - Re 22:20 ¶ *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*